

Army teaches lingo to airmen providing war-zone support

BY RON JENSEN
Stars and Stripes

RAF MILDENHALL, England — The battle in Iraq is complex and success can turn on the definition of a word, said Air Force Col. Ken Dornier, deputy director of the Combined Air Operations Center in Qatar.

So, when Army troops on the ground ask for air support of a certain type, the request is "decoded" by soldiers working within the combined operations center.

"We speak two different languages," Dornier said in a telephone interview. "Words have very different meanings."

For the past year, the job of explaining soldier lingo to Air Force officials preparing air support in Iraq and Afghanistan has fallen to the Army's 19th Battlefield Coordination Detachment out of Ramstein Air Base, Germany, where it is embedded with the 32nd Air Operations Center.

"It's a pretty big challenge," said U.S. Army Col. Jim Waring, commander of the 19th BCD, in a telephone interview. "At any given time, there are 20 ground operations in [Operation Iraq Freedom] and 15 in [Operation Enduring Freedom] with air support."

"Every troop on the ground, if he wants it."

The 19th BCD, which will return to Germany in mid-September and be replaced by the 1st BCD out of Fort Bragg, N.C., has handled about 15,000 requests for air support during its time in the Combined Air Operations Center, Waring said.

The BCD's task is to ensure the flying service understands what the ground pounders are requesting.

For example, troops on the ground may ask the Air Force to "disrupt" an enemy threat, Dor-

ner said. Such a word doesn't exist in the Air Force lexicon, but it has a specific meaning—to render incapable of operating without destroying—for the Army.

"What would happen if you didn't do the right thing?" Dornier said. "You could apply too much force or not enough force."

It is a gentle balance, at times, he said, to not alienate the local population with an overwhelming show of force that might not be necessary.

Waring said the process starts with an air support request from the Army commander on the ground. That moves up Army channels to the theater command where all of a day's requests are considered and prioritized.

When the requests reach the battlefield detachment in the combined operations center, they already have been approved.

Waring's people ensure that the Air Force understands what exactly is being requested.

"The Army requests the capability and the Air Force identifies the best platform for that requirement," Waring said.

Battlefield coordination detachments have been around only since the 1980s, Waring said. His unit began as the U.S. Army Europe liaison to U.S. Air Forces in Europe and became a battlefield coordination element in the early 1990s.

The name was changed again before the end of the decade. The Army has only four battlefield coordination detachments, Waring said, although a fifth one is about to stand up at Shaw Air Force Base, S.C.

The ongoing effort is the first sustained use of the BCD concept, Waring said.

"This is an ideal opportunity to validate the way we train our BCDs and how we equip them," he said.

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SCOTT SCHONAUER/Stars and Stripes

An A-10 with the 81st Fighter Squadron, based at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, flies over the Helebrange range in Kleinle Brogel, Belgium. The service's A-10s regularly deploy to provide air support in Iraq and Afghanistan to Army soldiers. The Army trains Air Force members in "soldier lingo" to ensure that the flying service understands what ground pounders are requesting during operations.



PHOTOS BY BEN MURRAY/Stars and Stripes

Members of one of the 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Regiment's Wolfpacks scan a tree line for the source of shots that "wounded" several soldiers during a training scenario in Hohenfels, Germany, on Wednesday. The tanks are part of newly comprised mixed companies that include heavy armor, mechanized troops and Humvees being used by the 1st Armored Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team.

1st AD transforms unit's assets for new scenarios

BY BEN MURRAY
Stars and Stripes

HOHENFELS, Germany — More than two years ago, elements of the 1st Armored Division preparing to go to Iraq trained for battle in scenarios that, in the words of one soldier, were "more like Vietnam War stuff."

Tank battles and open-field fighting were part of the regimen, with large-scale assaults against a defined enemy.

"The last [training rotation] we had ... the focus was on some major combat operations," said Capt. Jason Conde, commander of the 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Regiment's Company A.

But these days, even as some politicians and legislators increasingly compare Iraq to the American military quagmire of 30 years ago, soldiers at the Hohenfels training area this week were preparing for an entirely different war zone, regiment members said.

Riding in a Humvee on his way to meet an informant in "Tikrit" on Tuesday, Conde said preparing for war in Iraq has little to do with offensive tactics, and much more to do with gathering information and talking to Iraqi citizens.

"They're really been integrating that into our training," Conde said.

Troops from two companies of the 1-35th unanimously said the scenarios this time are more pertinent to the realities of Iraq, with missions set almost exclusively in urban settings and including a rash of ambushes, improvised explosive device attacks and even a kidnapping.

"Physically, it's actually easier than it was before. Mentally, it's more tough," said Sgt. Alejandro Romar, another Company A sol-



First Lt. Patrick Fagan, right, motions to his troops in Company A of the 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Regiment while talking to an "Iraqi policeman" at the Hohenfels training area Wednesday. As part of his unit's preparation to return to Iraq this fall, Fagan's unit was out hunting for a vehicle used in a fictional kidnapping of a U.S. citizen.

dier. In a firefight or a raid, training takes over and reactions become automatic, he said, but constantly trying to decide which people or roadside items have the potential to attack is taxing when "everything is something that can blow up," he said.

But while soldiers agreed the scenarios have improved, many were more skeptical of the way the force is being set up to fight its coming battles.

While in Hohenfels this week, the 1st AD's 2nd Brigade has been transformed into the "combat team" organization it will retain when it leaves for Iraq late in the fall. That allows commanders to mix and match pieces of the brigade's assets to fit their mission, in this case creating companies of Humvee-borne troops backed by small groups of tanks and Bradleys.

On Conde's mission to Tikrit, for instance, several Humvees

rolled up to the town between the muzzles of an Abrams tank and a Bradley, which provided potent intimidation power on the edge of the city.

But when the soldiers moved into the town on foot, the armor stayed behind as a less-than-effective piece of an information-gathering patrol.

"The biggest thing we use the tank for is shock effect," Conde said. But for some, the tradeoff for having that shock value was questionable.

"Right now, I have less people than I should," said Romar, leading a squad of troops on foot. With part of the force dedicated to the bulky armor outside the town, the number of foot soldiers available had been cut, he said.

But Conde and others said the setup made the company more adaptable, allowing it to react to violent situations with a variety of forces.

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